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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY: KOSTUNICA TARGETS NATO

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Serbian leaders generally termed the Kosovo Troika's first visit to Belgrade as positive and a new start -- leaving behind the Ahtisaari's proposal. The DSS quickly dismissed partition of Kosovo as unacceptable and instead made pronouncements alleging that NATO is trying to form a "state" in Europe through Kosovo independence. Deputy PM Djelic made news by hinting at a policy change regarding Kosovo debt maintenance that we expect the GOS will not implement. End Summary.

GOS "SATISFIED" WITH TROIKA

¶2. (U) After the August 10 Belgrade meeting of Serbian officials and the mediating Troika, President Tadic said in a cabinet statement that the new negotiations present an opportunity to find a compromise solution on Kosovo. He underscored that any final status decision must come from the UN Security Council. PM Kostunica noted in the same statement that the Ahtisaari plan cannot be the basis of the new talks. FM Jeremic told the press that Belgrade resolutely rejects Maarti Ahtisaari's plan and Kosovo independence. Minister for Kosovo Samardzic claimed that the Troika did not mention the Ahtisaari plan and called it a good sign. Samardzic said that Serbia was "satisfied" with the visit and the Troika format.

NO PARTITION

¶3. (U) The GOS and Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) publicly rejected EU Envoy Ischinger's widely publicized suggestion that the Troika would not oppose partition (among other things) if both Belgrade and Pristina agree to it. On August 13, a spokesman for Kostunica's DSS party told the press that partition was "unacceptable" for Serbia. More dramatically, SOC Church Bishop Artemije told Dnevnik that he preferred imposed independence to partition because "everything that is imposed is temporary." Artemije also said that an imposed solution would be tantamount to occupation and "every occupation...ends." Artemije added that the "offer" of EU membership to Serbia does not help "when the EU is the one that is ripping apart our national identity."

DSS: NATO WANTS A STATE

¶4. (SBU) Increasingly, senior DSS officials echoed the political theory that NATO is using Kosovo independence to obfuscate an intention to create a "NATO state." Last week, Kostunica advisor and UNOSEK negotiator Aleksandar Simic told NIN magazine that some in the international community are using Kosovo independence to "establish a NATO state." Simic added that "a careful analysis of Ahtisaari's proposal, and especially of provisions in Annex XI, raises the issue as to whether the world is faced for the first time with the efforts of a military alliance to create its own state where civilian institutions would not restrict its military might." Simic warned that with NATO would control, without limits, all military presence in Kosovo and that "Camp Bondsteel would practically be the capital of an 'independent' Kosovo."

15. (SBU) Senior DSS officials have built on this theory and increasingly targeted NATO (and the USG by thinly veiled association) as a scheming force behind Kosovo independence. On August 11, Interior Minister (and deputy DSS head) Dragan Jovic told Beta Saturday the U.S. "must give up on its project" to "create a NATO state," based on Annex 11 of the Ahtisaari plan. Jovic called on the U.S. to withdraw support for the Ahtisaari plan and to support negotiations based on a "strong framework of international law and the Serbian constitution." On August 13, DSS spokesman Branislav Ristivojevic told reporters that Serbia is hearing "from NATO, and from the country that stands behind NATO, the U.S,...a kind of supreme cynicism. If we agree not to discuss their intentions, then we can be their allies and partners." Speaking for his party two days later, Ristivojevic told Tanjug news agency that Serbia should not join NATO if it must "give up on Kosovo" to do so.

16. (U) On August 14, Education Minister and senior DSS official Zoran Loncar used even stronger terms. According to wires, Loncar said that NATO capitalized on "problems with the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo" to "create its first military puppet state." Loncar said NATO "bombed Serbia, brought its troops to Kosovo," and is now using Annex 11 of the Ahtisaari plan "to set up a state of its own" without limits to military power. He said "Serbia will never allow NATO to create a quasi-state on its territory." Finally, on August 15, Kosovo Minister Samardzic added his voice and called on the U.S. to abandon the idea of creating "[their] NATO state" in the form of independent Kosovo.

17. (SBU) In a surprising display of solidarity with DSS cabinet members, Labor and Social Policy Minister Ljajic said on August 15 dismissed the threat of violence in Kosovo as "a bad model for solving a political problem" and that Kosovo negotiations should have no deadline. Ljajic, who ran with Tadic's DS party in the January 2007 elections, had refrained from such public mimicry of

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the Kostunica line until now.

DJELIC MAKES NEWS ON DEBT, POLICY CHANGE UNLIKELY

18. (SBU) Unsourced news reports this week cited an alleged statement in July by Deputy PM Bozidar Djelic that he plans to raise Serbia's financing of Kosovo's debt with the World Bank (at the fall meetings in Washington). Djelic noted that while Serbia services Kosovo's debt, taxes from Kosovo citizens go to UNMIK (actually the PISG). Thus, he felt the Bank should not hold Serbia responsible for the debt.

Thus, he felt the Bank should not hold Serbia responsible for the debt. It does not appear that Djelic's comments have any blessing from those with actual authority on Kosovo political and economic policy. (Note: The GOS has refrained from asking the Bank to erase Kosovo debt as it would undermine Serbia's sovereignty claim over Kosovo. End note.)

19. (SBU) Econoff has raised this issue in several introductory calls. At the technocrat level, several contacts admit they would like to find a way to get the debt off their books, but each of them have commented that any decision would only be made at the highest political levels and they did not foresee any change in the current policy. To push the debt off their books would involve signing a document that would not fit with the leadership's negotiation strategy, and just to stop paying it would restrict Serbia's access to future loans. Post will continue to follow this issue.

REPORTED USG STATEMENTS

110. (U) RTS reported on August 15 that U.S Special Envoy for Kosovo Frank Wisner telling Serbian VOA service that the framework principle of the mediation mission for the Kosovo status talks is based on the Contact Group principles but that the Troika is

prepared to consider all ideas presented by Pristina and Belgrade. Wisner reiterated that Ahtisaari's plan is "very much alive" and that enjoys support of many countries.

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

¶11. (U) Russia: Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexeyev was quick to clarify, in comments to Vercernje Novesti on August 14, that Serbia that had not raised partition during or following the visit of the Troika. Alexeyev said that the first official mention was that of EU envoy Wolfgang Ischinger. Russia's Troika representative Aleksandar Botsan-Kharchenko was quoted in local press on August 15 as saying that the plan offered by Ahtisaari is not a basis for the negotiations and described claims that Kosovo's partition is an option as "spurious."

¶12. (U) KFOR: On August 15, B92 cited KFOR Commanding General Roland Kather as saying that "the Kosovo situation might reach violence if the mediating Contact Group Troika does not persuade the parties to arrive at an agreement." Kather also said that "patience is not endless and the decision about Kosovo's future status has to be made as soon as possible." Kosovo Ministry State Secretary Dusan Prorokovic responded in the press by saying that KFOR is ultimately responsible for Kosovo's stability.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) The DSS has added the specter of a "NATO state" to its Kosovo policy campaign to its repertoire of sensationalist propaganda for the domestic and international consumption. Kostunica and his ministers had been quiet since late June, when their anti-U.S. rhetoric culminated into a "battle for Kosovo" between the U.S. and Serbia, "between power and justice." Kostunica renewed hard-line rhetoric that still plays well to the nationalists. Kostunica has also seized on a target of opportunity to use Kosovo to pry away public support for NATO integration, something DS would have publicly protested in the past. Tadic and his DS ministers' silence has spoken for them this time. End Comment.

MUNTER